



# **Catholic Faith, Life & Creed**

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## **Breaking Open the Word**

by Mary Birmingham

## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A**



Christ Feeding the Multitude: Coptic icon; Artist unknown



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

### Prayer before Mass

Almighty and ever-living God,  
I approach the sacrament  
of Your only-begotten Son  
Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
I come sick to the doctor of life,  
unclean to the fountain of mercy,  
blind to the radiance of eternal light,  
and poor and needy to the Lord  
of heaven and earth.  
Lord, in your great generosity,  
heal my sickness,  
wash away my sin,  
enlighten my blindness, enrich my poverty,  
and clothe my nakedness.  
May I receive the bread of angels,  
the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
with humble reverence,  
with the purity and faith,  
the repentance and love,  
and the determined purpose  
that will help to bring me to salvation.  
May I receive the sacrament  
of the Lord's Body and Blood,  
and its reality and power.

Kind God,  
may I receive the Body  
of Your only-begotten Son,  
our Lord Jesus Christ,

born from the womb of the Virgin Mary,  
and so be received into His mystical body  
and numbered among His members.

Loving Father,  
as on my earthly pilgrimage  
I now receive Your beloved Son  
under the veil of a sacrament,  
may I one day see him face to face in glory,  
who lives and reigns with You for ever.

St. Thomas Aquinas

**Catholic  
Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
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Word worksheets  
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy segues into Matthew's next catechism thesis. We have been focusing our attention these past weeks on the reign of God. Matthew now moves us to the reign of the Church—the ministry of disciples in the post-resurrection church.
- ▶ Faith in Jesus is a central theme over the next few weeks. It requires faith to believe that Christ will feed the multitudes and faith is strengthened by the very fact that he does.
- ▶ Our Eucharistic liturgy echoes the feeding story in today's Gospel and helps us understand the sacrament that unites us as the Body of Christ.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## First Reading: Isaiah 55: 1-3

- ▶ Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the reign of God is likened to a lavish banquet.
- ▶ Today's first reading and Gospel proclaim God as the One who satisfies every spiritual and physical hunger.
- ▶ God forged a covenant with his people. That covenant was ratified with a meal.
- ▶ The meal in antiquity was laden with symbolic, religious, and social overtones.
- ▶ The symbolism of the meal echoed God's covenantal relationship with the people of Israel. Premier Jewish feasts such as Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread were rooted in a ritual meal. Ritual meals recalled God's salvation history.
- ▶ Sharing a meal represented strong bonds of kinship making betrayal and disloyalty an appalling insult.
- ▶ The Wisdom tradition insists that the teacher passes on the bread of wisdom to his disciples.
- ▶ The great feast of which Isaiah speaks was also a metaphor for the messianic reign of God. Jesus used those same metaphors to speak of the advent of God's reign.
- ▶ Isaiah insists that God cares for the needs of those who are returning from exile. They are dejected, poor, and broken after their arduous ordeal. They are desperate for a God who compassionately ministers to their needs.
- ▶ God recognizes their emptiness and satisfies their deepest hungers and longings.
- ▶ Those who seek the Lord in humility will not be disappointed. When seekers come to the Lord's banquet aware of their poverty and powerlessness God does not disappoint. God's love and mercy is lavishly showered upon his people.
- ▶ Early Christians believed that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the Eucharistic feast inaugurated by Christ foreshadowed today in the feeding of the multitudes.
- ▶ Jesus invites the multitudes to come and eat rich fare.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this reading from Isaiah?
- ▶ In what way does this reading speak to your life?
- ▶ In what way has God satisfied your deepest hungers?
- ▶ What are your deepest hungers and longings?

### Second Reading: Romans 8 35, 37-39

- ▶ Paul’s understanding of Christ as the Lord of the universe resonates in today’s reading from Romans.
- ▶ He insists that nothing can separate us from the love of God and then names the cosmic forces that have no power to separate Christians from God’s love.
- ▶ Paul stakes his life and mission on one absolute truth: God is manifest in Christ—they are one and the same.
- ▶ Paul reminds the Romans that the love of Christ for all humanity is made present in the sacrifice of the cross.
- ▶ We have experienced God’s love through Jesus’ sacrifice. We know the extent of God’s love because we have experienced the extent of Christ’s love—love made perfect on the cross of salvation.
- ▶ God offered his firstborn son for the salvation of the world.
- ▶ We dare not lose hope in God’s love for us. The One who sacrificed his only Son for our sake will care for his own.
- ▶ We are to have no fear. We are children of the Most High God and thus have nothing to fear. God will care for our needs.
- ▶ Evil powers have absolutely no power over us because Jesus crushed their power through his victory over death.
- ▶ We are not immune from the onslaught of evil powers, but in the end they will have no lasting effect upon us. We will not be conquered. We too will be victorious.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ How can we appropriate Paul's message in our lives today? What are the implications of what Paul is teaching the Romans?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that nothing can separate us from the love of God? If we truly believed that, how would we live our lives differently?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that God loves you as much as Paul insists he loves us?

## Gospel: Matthew 14:13-21

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
  
- ▶ Matthew is speaking to a Jewish community thus he uses images, themes and theology rooted in the Old Testament.
- ▶ Jesus' and his mission was compared to the mission of Moses, the great Old Testament hero and deliverer of the people.
- ▶ Matthew's community was reminded that Jesus came to forge a new covenant built upon the covenant God forged with the people of Israel.
- ▶ The comparisons between Jesus and Moses are not to be missed.
- ▶ Moses went up the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. Jesus went up the mountain to teach the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount—the new law.
- ▶ Moses led the people through the Red Sea, into the desert and then fed the people manna. Jesus fed the multitudes by the sea.
- ▶ Moses fed the people by the power of God; so did Jesus.
- ▶ It is believed that the Gospel of Matthew was written following the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 AD.
- ▶ Pharisaic Jews ostracized Matthew's community.
- ▶ The community struggled to maintain its identity in the midst of a growing number of Gentile Christians.
- ▶ Gentile Christians were not bound to Judaism and thus did not feel it was necessary to follow Judaic customs and traditions.
- ▶ This created tension between the two factions of Christians.
- ▶ Some Jewish Christians returned to their Jewish roots. Others formed their own communities.
- ▶ Many Jewish Christians longed for the security of the Law and the teaching imposed by the Pharisees.
- ▶ Matthew's overarching polemic, however, was the *new* covenant forged by Jesus.
- ▶ Matthew stressed Jesus' God-given teaching authority and his divinely appointed new covenant.





## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ In what way, if any, can you relate to the Jewish converts to Christianity who felt out of place in the new Christian community comprised mostly of gentile Christians?
- ▶ Imagine a new preacher were to come and preach a new covenant between God and his people today? How easy or difficult would it be to embrace his teaching? What were the challenges of the Jewish people of Jesus' day?
- ▶ What are the implications for us?
  
- ▶ Bread was an important symbol in Matthew's community. Matthew's community gathered for the breaking of the bread—one ritual meal that distinguished Christian practice from Jewish practice.
- ▶ The appearance of John the Baptist reminds the reader of what Jesus had yet to endure.
- ▶ He is a reminder that the fate of prophets is martyrdom.
- ▶ John has a two-fold purpose. The reader is soberly reminded of his or her own mortality—everyone will die and he foreshadows the martyred death of the Lord yet to come.
- ▶ John prepares the reader for Jesus' future passion and death.
- ▶ John is a reminder that Jesus' feeding leads to his death.
- ▶ He is a reminder that we too are called to go out and offer our lives as food for others.
- ▶ It is interesting to note that Third World missionaries are often martyred for simply feeding poor people and teaching them how to feed themselves.
- ▶ Jesus' constant exhortation to feed the hungry lies at the root of his mission. All people will be judged at the end of time on how well they followed Jesus' command to care for the least among them.
- ▶ There is an obvious connection in Matthew's Gospel between the Lord's Supper and today's feeding of the multitudes.
  - Both feedings take place in the evening.
  - Jesus **took** the food (bread, loaves and fish) in each story.
  - Jesus **blessed** the food in both stories.
  - Jesus **broke** the loaves and **gave** them to his *disciples* in both stories.
- ▶ There is an inherent call to mission in today's story.
- ▶ Jesus gave bread to his disciples and they in turn gave it to the people. The role of the Christian community is to go out and offer the Bread of Life to others. It is what it means to be **church**.

- ▶ Matthew's Jesus teaches the community the role and mission of the Church.
- ▶ In chapter thirteen Jesus was unable to perform a miracle because of the people's lack of faith.
- ▶ Contrast that with the miracle in today's Gospel that is performed *because* of the people's faith.
- ▶ The people's faith is rooted in their trust of Jesus' authority and his power.
- ▶ How do we know they had such faith? They brought their sick friends and loved ones to Jesus to be healed.
- ▶ The faith of the people was stronger than the weak faith of the disciples. The disciples questioned Jesus when he told them to go out to neighboring villages to secure food for the crowd. They were incredulous. How could they feed so many with such meager provisions? They doubted Jesus' ability to supply what was needed. Moses also doubted God in the desert.
- ▶ The feeding of the multitude echoes many themes.
  - God provided for the Israelites in the desert just as he provides for the people in this story, just as he provides for all people.
  - The over-abundance that was left over was a sign that the final, messianic age had arrived.
  - Jesus satisfies our hungers and our deepest physical and spiritual needs and longings.
  - The leftover food was gathered in twelve baskets echoing the twelve tribes of Israel. God provided enough food to provide for all of Israel's needs.
  - The Eucharist Jesus leaves us as his legacy will feed is for the whole world.
  - Jesus has compassionate, love, care and mercy for his people—especially the poor, sick, oppressed and marginalized.
  - There is a call to be in solidarity with those who are hungry, malnourished and scramble for food each and every day of their lives.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example.

- ▶ Name a time in your life in which God nourished you (or someone you know) when you needed to be nourished?
- ▶ Name a time in your life (or the life of someone you know) when God provided abundance out of the little you (or they) had in reserve?
- ▶ For those who are preparing to be fed at the Lord's Table in the future, what does your future participation in the Eucharist mean to you at this point?
- ▶ For those who are full participants in the Eucharistic banquet, what does your participation mean for your life?

- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel for our parish community and for our lives of discipleship?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.



## APPENDIX

- Name a time in your life in which God nourished you (or someone you know) when you needed to be nourished?

Living with a chronically mentally person in the family is stressful at best. There are times when it seems that God has abandoned us. Progress is often indiscernible. A wonderful lady came to me recently to tell me that she felt God was asking her to pray with me for my son. We gathered quietly in the chapel. We sat quietly. She prayed in silence; she simply asked God to heal my son. We sat in quiet for about ten minutes. She told me that she experienced two things in prayer. She felt a powerful sense of God's presence and a sense of the suffering and darkness my child endures. She promised to continue to pray. We left the chapel as quietly and unobtrusively as we entered it.

God used that encounter to teach me a powerful lesson. God is intimately involved in the illness of my child; he upholds him and our family in the throes of this horrible disease.

There have been subtle changes since she prayed with us—perhaps changes only a family would notice. Subtle though they are, some of the changes are also profound, nearly taking our breath away.

The courageous woman listened to that small, still voice within and in obedience to God reached out to me in prayer. She was bread for me and for my child. Like all things in my life I am called to trust that God is with us in all things, even when it seems that he is absent.

He has given us the Eucharist in order to experience his presence in the midst of his absence. He invites each and every one of us to reach out to others to be bread for them just as that wonderful woman was bread for me.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Symbols of Bread and Wine  
Sacraments  
Church/Ecclesiology  
Church Structure

Faith  
Cross and Paschal Mystery  
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

Bread played an important role in Matthew's gospel because one thing that distinguished Christians from Jews was the fact that Christians gathered for the breaking of the bread. The feeding of the multitudes reminds us that Christ continues to feed us in the Eucharist. We are reminded that our sacraments call us to faith and deep conversion of heart. When we approach the Eucharist it should be out of deep love for God and a commitment to become what we are—the Body of Christ—and what we have received—the Body and Blood of Christ. It is thus appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session today on the symbols of bread and wine in the Eucharist.

## SACRAMENTS

The feeding story in today's Gospel is a reminder that Christ continues to be present to us in the sacraments of the Church. We are reminded that our sacraments call us to faith and conversion of heart. When we approach the sacraments it should be out of deep love for God and a commitment to allow the sacraments to confront us and transform us to more fully conform our lives to the life of Christ and thus become the disciples we are called to become. It is thus appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session today on the SACRAMENTS of the Church.

## CHURCH/ECCLESIOLOGY

The past few weeks the Gospel parables have been teaching us about the kingdom of God. This section moves now into the kingdom of the Church, the mission of the disciples that will be built after the resurrection. Jesus emphasizes the faith of the Church as he prepares his disciples to go out and feed a hungry world. It is thus appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session today on the Church's understanding of what it means to be CHURCH—our ECCLESIOLOGY.

## **CHURCH STRUCTURE**

The past few weeks the Gospel parables have been teaching us about the kingdom of God. This section moves now into the kingdom of the Church, the mission of the disciples that will be built after the resurrection. Jesus emphasizes the faith of the Church as he prepares his disciples to go out and feed a hungry world. It is thus appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session today on the Church's understanding of CHURCH STRUCTURE.

## **FAITH**

Jesus called the people to faith in him by the works he performed. Today he fed the multitudes with an abundance left over. His action was a reminder of God's providential care of his children. This liturgy is a call to deep conversion and faith in God. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about FAITH.

## **CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY**

Every liturgy is a celebration of the cross of Christ and ultimately his Paschal Mystery. In today's liturgy, Paul reminds us that we are called to follow Jesus' example. His faithfulness and obedience to God's will resulted in the offering of his life for the sins of humanity. We are called to similar faith and obedience. We are all called to take up our cross each and every day and join our lives to the cross of Christ. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

## **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.